

News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 9, 2001

CONTACTS: Steve Capps
(916) 651-8750

STATEMENT FROM RUSTY AREIAS, DIRECTOR OF CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS

SACRAMENTO – State Parks Director Rusty Areias today issued the following statement in response to the shooting deaths of two people Sunday evening at Morro Strand State Beach in San Luis Obispo County. A suspect is in custody.

“I want to offer my condolences and express my profound sympathy for the families of the two victims of this terrible act of violence. Words cannot express the sadness I feel, a sadness all of us in the State Parks family share today.

“At State Parks we pride ourselves on the safety of our parks. But the fact that this is such a rare occurrence in the history of State Parks does not ease the grief these families are feeling, nor the shock we must all feel that this has happened.

“I commend our State Parks rangers, whose quick response and bravery in taking the suspect into custody prevented any further injury or loss of life,” Areias said.

The shooting occurred about 6:30 p.m. at Morro Strand State Beach, just north of Morro Bay. Killed were Jerry Rios, 11 years of age, from Gardena, and Stephen Mills, 37, of San Pedro, who reportedly was the boy’s uncle. The suspect in the shooting, identified as Stephen A. Deflaur, 42, of Blythe, was wounded and taken into custody by State Parks Rangers who responded to the scene within minutes of the attack. The suspect was shot by a State Parks Ranger after refusing to drop his weapon. He was hospitalized but expected to survive. No officers or other park visitors were injured.

A possible motive for the shooting is under investigation. Witnesses said the suspect had argued with the two victims at a campsite. The victims were walking to the State Parks kiosk at the entrance to the park when they were shot, according to the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff’s Department.

State Parks officials said it was only the fifth officer-involved shooting in the department’s history. State Parks Rangers and Lifeguards are trained peace officers.

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